



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
8 December 2011

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-sixth session

27 February-9 March 2012

Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern, and further actions and initiatives; priority theme: "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges"

Statement submitted by Asia Pacific Women's Watch, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

Statement

Asia Pacific Women's Watch is a regional network organization that spreads across the five subregions of Asia and the Pacific. It represents the voices of this network and welcomes the priority theme for the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges".

Asia Pacific Women's Watch recognizes that the priority theme is a prerequisite to the realization of the Beijing Platform for Action, the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which is the only human rights instrument that specifically addresses the situation of rural women. It also recognizes the opportunity for Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) to address situations specific to rural women in conflict and war-affected areas.

The Asia-Pacific is home to 60 per cent of the world's population. A large percentage of this population lives in rural areas, a significant proportion of which are women.

Rural women in the Asia-Pacific region face inequities based on gender and rooted in structural oppression through class, caste, race, religion, sexuality and ethnicity, among other factors. However, rural women should not be viewed as victims but as agents of change, as they struggle for rights, identity, dignity, empowerment and full potentiality. Asia Pacific Women's Watch recognizes the importance of understanding and acknowledging the complexity and dynamism of women who live in rural contexts and recognizes that strategies to address rural women's issues should vary depending on women's empirical realities. A "one policy fits all" solution cannot work.

Poverty is heavily concentrated in rural areas where development is impeded by the inadequate consideration given to it in national economic development policies and strategies, including poverty reduction strategies. The marginal allocation of resources to implement global and national policy commitments on rural development and the long-term neglect of the agricultural sector are also factors that impede the alleviation of rural women's poverty.

Globally, rural development strategies are negatively affected by neoliberal globalization in terms of commercialization of the agricultural sector, liberalization of trade and commoditization of food and other agricultural products. The increase in labour migration and the privatization of resources and services, including health services, have further marginalized and had an impact on rural women across the region.

The impact of this phenomenon at the national level is evident in the economic and development policies across the region. For rural women, this is reflected in the lack of access to quality services, including sexual and reproductive health services; non-existent or low-impact social security nets; the insecurity and vulnerability of livelihoods; violence; and the lack of food security and of access to resources.

In some instances, discriminatory sociocultural structures and practices, including unequal gender relations, are reinforced, causing a greater impact on rural women's lives. As women are most expected to act according to sociocultural norms and traditions, rural women are also vulnerable to discrimination and violence based

on sexual orientation and gender identity. Honour killings of and acid throwing on women in the region continue to violate women's right to life.

Despite the attention given to the situation and concerns of rural women and their critical contribution to rural development, their rights and priorities remain insufficiently addressed in legal frameworks, national and local development policies and investment strategies at all levels.

Financing for development, including for the agricultural sector, and domestic resource mobilization towards rural development are affected by inequitable resource allocation and the lack of political will to institute land reforms that recognize women's right to land ownership. Large-scale rural-urban migration is an added pressure in terms of access to services and resources. Asia Pacific Women's Watch reiterates the need for the inclusion of women in decision-making, where macroeconomic and microeconomic policies that would better serve women and men are conceptualized and implemented.

Inequalities and discrimination in women and girls' access to education, nutrition and health services, including sexual and reproductive health services, and access to and control over land, fishing resources and other productive resources, impede on women's opportunities for decent work, gainful employment, income-generating activities and full participation in public life.

Rural women face serious challenges in carrying out their multiple burdens in their productive and reproductive roles. Their situation is exacerbated in times of armed conflict, increasing religious fundamentalism and conservatism, natural disasters and disease epidemics, among others. Furthermore, the rights and priorities of rural women continue to be insufficiently addressed.

According to 1990-2008 estimates developed by the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund and the World Bank, there are high levels of maternal mortality in countries of the region (340 per 100,000 live births in Bangladesh, 200 in Bhutan, 290 in Cambodia, 250 in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, 230 in India, 240 in Indonesia, 580 in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, 240 in Myanmar, 380 in Nepal and 260 in Pakistan) where about 80 per cent of the population lives in rural areas and where there are severe limitations in safe delivery services. Although international maternal mortality ratio estimates for the Pacific island countries are largely lacking, Fiji, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands are noted for high maternal mortality rates in the region.

With preventable causes, the issue of maternal deaths becomes an issue of national policy priorities. Multiple levels of discrimination and marginalization are experienced by women within communities where the maternal mortality ratio is highest, and these are also communities that are invariably linked with poverty.

Asia Pacific Women's Watch calls for the adoption of a continuum of care approach, in which the quality of care that both mother and newborn receive during pregnancy, at childbirth or during abortion, and in the early post-natal or post-abortion period is essential to ensuring that women remain healthy and that children get a strong start.

The push for one of the indicators of Goal 5 of the Millennium Development Goals (the presence of a skilled attendant at birth) is leaving out home deliveries

and a continuum of care in many of the developing countries in the region. There should be more skilled service providers at the community level, and traditional birth attendants and skills-building should be recognized as a part of the continuum of care for the maternal mortality ratio reduction strategy.

Issues relating to women with disabilities are an emerging concern in the Asia-Pacific region. It has been estimated that globally, there are 300 million women and girls with disabilities, of whom the majority live in developing countries. A detailed global picture on how gender and disability intersect is hampered by the unavailability of comprehensive data and the challenges of quantification in such fields as the feminization of poverty, cultural concepts of gender roles and sexual and reproductive rights, violence, abuse and other types of exploitation, such as child labour.

More than 50 per cent of women's livelihoods remain confined to the urban and rural informal sectors, where there is no provision for regulated remuneration, safe working environments or access to high levels of marketable skills development. Women's remuneration in these enterprises is most often half that of men.

The frequency of disasters, whether natural or human-made, in the Asia-Pacific region conclusively shows that disasters affect women and men differently. These gender differences need to be understood and integrated into disaster mitigation policies and programmes and integrated into disaster recovery programmes that rebuild communities and economies.

There is an urgent need to prioritize mechanisms to make national-level, gender-disaggregated data available. Asia Pacific Women's Watch calls upon all Governments and United Nations bodies to ensure the creation of enabling conditions, as clearly articulated in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals, to ensure that women and men have equal access to resources and marketable skills and to enhance their right to engage at all levels in decisions which affect their lives.



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Statement submitted by Brothers of Charity, Communications Coordination Committee for the United Nations, Eastern African Sub-Regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women, Human Lactation Center, International Association of Schools of Social Work, International Council of Psychologists, International Council Of Women, International Federation of Business and Professional Women, International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, IUS PRIMI VIRI International Association, Mahila Dakshata Samiti, National Council of Women of the United States, Northern Ireland Women's European Platform, Rural Development Leadership Network, Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, Soroptimist International, Women's Intercultural Network, Women's Welfare Centre, World Association for Psychosocial Rehabilitation, World Federation for Mental Health and Worldwide Organization for Women, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

Statement

The promotion of mental health and societal well-being, the prevention and treatment of mental illness and emotional distress and improvement in the delivery and quality of mental health services through advocacy and education at the United Nations has been advocated by the NGO Committee on Mental Health, which is affiliated with the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations and supported by a variety of organizations, including the ones above.

Historically, issues of mental health have often been overlooked in discussions at the United Nations, but this trend is changing, as evidenced by the inclusion of mental health in the recent Political Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases. The importance of promoting mental health for all people is recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO) in its Constitution when it states that "health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity; the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition" and "the health of all peoples is fundamental to the attainment of peace and security and is dependent upon the fullest co-operation of individuals and States".

The importance of promoting conditions for mental health and of treating mental illness among rural women, in order that they are empowered to fight poverty, eradicate hunger and promote sustainable development, cannot be overstated. This is consistent with the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, as reflected in article 25 (1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and article 12 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Forty per cent of the world's population lives on less than \$2 per day, and women and children are disproportionately represented among the impoverished and hungry. The ratio of women among the poor is rising, in effect creating a "feminization" of poverty. The mental health consequences of poverty among rural women are manifold. Poverty perpetuates hunger, violence, disease and fear. Women and girls living in rural settings in underdeveloped countries experience multiple challenges in accessing services vital to their physical and mental health, safety, education, employment and full economic development. They are more vulnerable to domestic violence and ongoing trauma. The WHO multi-country study of 2005 found that provincial (mostly rural) women living in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Peru and the United Republic of Tanzania had experienced the highest levels of domestic violence. Rural women in Ethiopia were also found to have higher levels of depression.

The cyclical interaction of mental health issues, such as low self-esteem and depression, with poverty, lack of education, lack of employment and lack of general empowerment towards betterment of themselves and their communities are well established. Rural women in particular may lack access even to popular images of empowerment or information about fundamental conditions for mental health and

thus be especially vulnerable to victimization and depression. Those with physical and mental disabilities are especially vulnerable in rural communities.

Education and physical and mental health are integrally connected. There are serious lifelong psychological consequences to the stunting of women's intellectual growth, including severe loss of self-esteem. Lack of educational opportunities and access to knowledge in rural areas perpetuates the problem. Education empowers girls and women to resist violence and assert themselves. It is imperative that we confront the attitudes and mores that perpetuate gender-based educational inequity, in order to remove barriers that prevent women and girls from engaging fully in community and workplace alike.

Creative microfinancing projects, such as Tostan, Kashf and Grameen, have made a significant difference to the economic plight of rural women in the developing world. With economic empowerment, women contribute to the prudent spending of resources on education, health and nourishing food and the ending of oppressive practices, such as female genital mutilation. Nonetheless, there are limits to microfinance as a quick fix to solve the deep problems of poverty in rural areas. Inability to make on-time repayments and increased debt have become a great source of stress for poor women, and there are many cases of suicide committed by poor women in India and elsewhere. As women are often the foundation of the family, the ability to survive economically is essential for achieving independence, especially for rural women.

Examples exist of culturally sensitive health and mental health interventions to ensure sustainability within rural communities. In Bolivia, a national programme has been incorporated to extend health-care coverage through an intercultural approach, including services for pregnant women in rural communities, recognizing that these women play a central role in health promotion and the prevention of disease and violence. In Nicaragua, the Wangki Tangni Women's Centre is an example of a community organization combining food safety work with training in human rights and the combating of violence faced by indigenous women.

Women and men encounter constraints in accessing health services in rural areas, but women face particular challenges on account of their reproductive and caregiving roles. Accessibility remains a particular problem for rural women, who face restrictions on mobility, lacking access to transport or means of contacting transport (e.g. cell phones).

These mental health issues are increasing, and depression has emerged in epidemic form as the third-ranked chronic illness burden on the international community, with WHO projecting that it will be the greatest chronic illness burden in human society by 2030. Neglecting the mental health consequences of poverty, lack of education, perpetuation of violence and lack of opportunity for economic development will have negative consequences for the future well-being of society.

Recommended action priorities:

- Women and girls must have access to education and training in order to facilitate their mental health and well-being and obtain employment of a kind that reduces poverty. Education will serve as a foundation for informed decision-making and participation in contributing to community sustainability;

- Adequate, culturally appropriate mental health screening, counselling and ongoing services for women and girls with chronic mental illness must be developed in close collaboration with communities served;
- The provision of adequate funding for mental health workers and the training of health workers to recognize mental illness are crucial;
- Women must be trained in assertiveness skills in order to feel confident in their decision-making abilities in male-dominated contexts;
- Access to information and communication technology, such as cell phones and computers in order to break the barriers of isolation and access information that can provide support of mental health of rural women and girls;
- Women in rural communities should have equal rights to own land and other property, including the right to inheritance, and other rights available to men. Property and land ownership will help support family structures and prevent poverty and related psychosocial problems.



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Statement submitted by Canadian Federation of Agriculture, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/L.



Statement

To create the key policies a rural woman needs, we must consider the many roles that a woman plays. She is a farmer and a mother. She is a breadwinner and probably a bread maker. She is ready to invest in her children and eager to protect the Earth.

She faces economic and social constraints. Women account for 60 to 80 per cent of smallholder farmers and produce 90 per cent of food in Africa and about half of all food worldwide. Yet in sub-Saharan Africa, only 15 per cent of landholders are women, and they receive less than 10 per cent of credit and 7 per cent of extension services. Policies that address gender inequalities could, conservatively, increase yields on women's farms by 2.5 per cent to 4 per cent. Women are key to food and nutrition security and sustainable development.

We need to empower rural women through policies that will help them in growing, marketing, conserving, adapting, caring, connecting and leading. Following are some recommendations.

Growing

- Develop a registration process for land tenure that is local, cheap, rapid, transparent and accessible for women
- Support women smallholder farmers by providing them with agricultural extension services, grain storage, infrastructure, information and technologies
- Localize the application of agronomic knowledge and pest identification and meteorological information
- Provide microfinance services, especially for microcredit, to women farmers
- Ensure that women farmers have access to agricultural inputs and services, including mechanical tools, breeding stock, seeds, fertilizers and crop protection materials
- Encourage and coordinate multiple local actors to ensure that information and supplies get into farmers' hands

Marketing

- Build local storage facilities and transportation mechanisms, including cold chain storage for food preservation
- Provide remote access to up-to-date market pricing information
- Develop well-functioning markets through transparent information, fair prices, sound infrastructure and proper regulation
- Empower farmers in organizational frameworks and encourage them to organize in marketing groups and cooperatives
- Improve smallholder farmers' marketing skills through entrepreneurship training
- Reduce market distortions to improve opportunities for all strata of agriculture worldwide

Conserving

- Invest in women farmers who are engaged in conservation agriculture to prevent soil erosion and land degradation
- Support programmes that help women farmers to manage watersheds and use water more efficiently
- Protect wildlife habitat and biodiversity through an integrated ecosystems approach that incorporates women's knowledge and leadership
- Promote sound management of chemical substances, including through the improvement of health and safety conditions for agricultural workers
- Invest in bioenergy where it contributes to energy security and to rural development

Adapting

- Provide early warning systems such as community-based disaster preparedness and management, and early weather forecasting systems to help them make decisions relating to sustainability and productivity
- Use a knowledge-based approach of best practices, commit to increasing support for farmer-to-farmer training, including specific programmes for women farmers, and value their traditional knowledge
- Popularize new policies, extension programmes, practices and technologies for beneficiaries in their languages and considering their level of education
- Ensure women farmers have access to stress-, flood- or drought-resistant seed varieties
- Support community-based, small-scale renewable bio-energies
- Make adaptation funds, risk management programmes and training on climate change impacts available to rural women

Caring

- Increase food security by investing in infrastructure, which includes roads, hospitals, clean water facilities, warehouses, schools and other initiatives to keep rural families together
- Require mandatory school programmes for girls and boys, along with social protection programmes and available child care
- Provide educational support for girls and women through training facilities, scholarships, mentoring, extension services and other forms of technical assistance
- Ensure access to proper maternal health services for women and focus particularly on nutrition for the first 1,000 days of mother and child
- Empower women in their roles as household managers and caregivers, which is a proven strategy for enhancing food security and nutritional outcomes, especially for children

Connecting

- Promote the development of village-based knowledge centres
- Support women's cooperatives and their participation in mixed cooperatives
- Increase the number of women extension agents and train male extension agents to become more gender sensitive
- Prioritize women's access to information communication technologies
- Establish open and transparent two-way exchanges that capture the "voice of the farmer" in the process of policy formulation and implementation

Leading

- Enhance capacity for leadership and alliances among rural women to build confidence, strengthen mutual support and develop advocacy and public speaking skills for influencing decisions that affect their lives
- Facilitate meaningful participation of women farmers in decision-making processes through mandatory quotas, benchmarks and indicators
- Foster the engagement of farmer organizations in policymaking on agriculture and rural development at international, national and regional levels



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Statement submitted by Dones per la Llibertat i Democràcia, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.



Statement

[Original: Spanish]

Resolution proposed by Dones per la Llibertat i Democràcia, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

Dones per la Llibertat i Democràcia ("Women for Liberty and Democracy") is an organization that is headquartered in Barcelona and is active throughout the territory of Spain and internationally, although the core of its activity is centred in Catalonia.

Since its establishment more than 10 years ago, it has been working for the freedom and human rights of women, the elimination of all forms of gender discrimination and equal representation of men and women.

All the activities carried out by Dones per la Llibertat i Democràcia are inspired by the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In February 2010, it was granted special consultative status by the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

The priority theme of the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women is the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges.

The number of rural women, most of whom are farmers, exceeds 1.6 billion, more than a quarter of the world's population. Women own only 2 per cent of the land and receive only 1 per cent of agricultural loans. Two thirds of the world's illiterate population are women. The number of rural women living in poverty has doubled since 1970. Work by women is often considered an inexhaustible natural resource to be exploited, and the unfair segregation prevailing in the labour market is even becoming more rigid.

In Spain, many advancements for women in rural areas have been pursued and achieved through the ASAJA-amfAR federations and associations and on the basis of European guidelines.

Training in setting up enterprises, companies and cooperatives and creating agritourism and solidarity-based economic enterprises for rural women has been promoted from Catalonia. It has also been possible for a significant number of rural Catalan women to become co-owners with their husbands.

In light of the foregoing, we recommend that all Member States:

- Promote sustainable and integrated growth and create new employment opportunities, especially for women and young people, as well as quality health and social services;
- Point out that the economic and social changes occurring in rural areas do not affect all women in the same way and that, although for some they represent opportunities, for others they constitute a difficult challenge and cause very serious problems;

- Generate growth and promote a social market economy by making full use of the considerable potential of women in the job market in rural and urban areas;
- Point out that many women in rural areas have occupations comparable to professional activity, but do not receive the recognition, protection or remuneration to which they are entitled;
- Point out that only a small number of women own farms, which are usually of limited economic size and low profitability, and that most women in rural areas work together with their male co-workers (fathers, brothers or husbands), who maintain exclusive ownership of the agricultural or livestock farm;
- Report that the employment rate of men and women in rural areas is lower and that, moreover, many women do not even participate in the labour market and, therefore, are not registered as unemployed and are not reflected in unemployment statistics, considering that the lack of high-quality job opportunities severely affects rural areas;
- Draw attention to the fact that the significant contribution by women to local and community development is not sufficiently reflected in their participation in the corresponding decision-making processes in the social, economic and political spheres;
- Promote efforts to ensure that rural areas can offer real opportunities through their growth potential in new sectors and the possibilities in the field of tourism, handicrafts and rural recreational activities managed for the most part by women, which constitutes an important economic factor for underdeveloped regions;
- Require that greater attention should be given to the gender dimension in drawing up budgets to ensure more effective management of rural development programmes and, in particular, that resources should be better adapted to the specific needs of women in rural areas, stressing that the elimination of inequalities and the promotion of equal opportunities for men and women must be mandatory goals in the policies of all countries in the world.